

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-02 INR-10 L-03

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R 291430Z JUN 73

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0035
INFO AMCONSUL MUNICH

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 7739

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, UR

SUBJ: RUMORED RETIREMENT OF PODGORNIY

1. DURING NATO COUNSELORS' MEETING JUNE 28, CANADIANS PASSED REPORT, RECEIVED SAME DAY FROM THEIR MPT DELEGATION IN HELSINKI, TO EFFECT THAT PODGORNIY WILL RETIRE AS CHAIRMAN OF PRESIDUM OF SUPREME SOVIET TOWARD END OF JULY TO BE REPLACED BY FONMIN GORMYKO. (REPORT DID NOT INDICATE WHETHER PODGORNIY WOULD RETIRE FROM POLITBURO ALSO.) SOURCE OF THE INFORMATION IS JUNIOR MEMBER OF SOVIET MPT DELEGATION WHO, CANADIANS SAY, HAS PROVED IN PAST TO BE "EXCEPTIONALLY WELL INFORMED."

2. EMBASSY HAS HEARED NO RECENT RUMORS IN MOSCOW WHICH WOULD SUBSTANTIATE THIS REPORT. PODGORNIY, ALTHOUGH NOW 70 YEARS OLD, HAS APPEARED HEALTHY AND VIGOROUS ON THREE RECENT OCCASIONS WHEN OBSERVED CLOSELY BY EMBOFFS.

3. TIME FRAME MENTIONED IN REPORT COINCIDES WITH SESSION OF USSR SUPREME SOVIET SCHEDULED TO CONVENE JULY 17 WHICH WOULD WELL BE PRECEDED BY PARTY PLENUM. IF CHANGE TO TAKE PLACE, PLENUM FOLLOWED BY SUPREME SOVIET SESSION WOULD BE NEEDED TO PROPOSE AND TO RATIFY SHIFTS.

4. EMBASSY INCLINED TO QUESTION WHETHER PARTY LEADERSHIP AND
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ESPECIALLY BREZHNEV, WOULD WISH TO MAKE CHANGE OF THIS NATURE,

PARTICULARLY AS IT GETS TO HEART OF PRINCIPLE OF COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP, SO SOON AFTER MAJOR SHAKE-UP RESULTING FROM APRIL PLENUM. WHILE BREZHNEV HAS CLEARLY MOVED FAR OUT AHEAD OF PODGORNIY AND KOSYGIN IN RECENT MONTHS, HIS GENERAL STYLE OF ACTION WOULD SUGGEST THAT HE REMAINS TIED TO COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE. WHILE WE DO NOT EXCLUDE DEPARTURES OF BOTH PODGORNIY AND KOSYGIN PRIOR TO NEXT PARTY CONGRESS, EMBASSY BELIEVES THESE MOVES LIKELY BE PART OF GRADUAL RPT GUADUAL RE-SHAPING OF LEADERSHIP CIRCLE WHICH BEGAN AT 24TH PARTY CONGRESS AND CONTINUED AT MOST RECENT PLENUM. A MAJOR CHANGE AT THE CENTER OF THE LEADERSHIP AT THIS JUNCTURE COULD LEAD TO CONCERNS THAT EXCESSIVE POWER IS GRAVITATING RADIDLY TOWARD BREZHNEV, SOMETHING BOTH HIS COLLEAGUES AND HE WOULD PROBABLY WISH TO AVOID.

5. MANY UNSUBSTANTIATED RUMORS THAT GROMYKO WOULD BE LEAVING THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAVE PERSISTED SINCE HIS ELEVATION TO POLITBURO MEMBERSHIP IN APRIL. GIVEN PRESENT EMPHASIS ON PURSUIT OF "PEACE PROGRAM," ODDS ARE PROBABLY AGAINST GROMYKO MOVING FROM FOREIGN MINISTRY AT A TIME WHEN DEFENSE AND KGB CHIEFS HAVE JUST MOVED INTO TOP LEADERSHIP CIRCLE. LACKING POWERFUL DOMESTIC CONSTITUENCY, GROMYKO HAS LITTLE PROSPECT OF ASSUMING HIGH-LEVEL POST IN PARTY APPARATUS; HOWEVER, HIS BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE COULD MARK HIM AS ONE POSSIBLE CANDIDATE TO REPLACE PODGORNIY AT SUCH TIME AS LEADERSHIP SHOULD DEPART FROM THE SCENE.
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